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Immediate Release

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Governor Richardson Orders Assessment of Mine Rock Stability in Questa

(Santa Fe, NM) — Governor Bill Richardson has ordered that measures be in place by July 15th to address the stability of a mine rock pile approximately 3.5 miles east of the town of Questa at the Molycorp mine. The Governor has designated the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) as the lead agency to work in conjunction with the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) and the Department of Public Safety (DPS), along with Molycorp officials to take proactive measures and address this issue.

State officials were informed of stability issues at the Capulin/Goathill North pile this week by a board of independent engineers reviewing mine stockpile stability at the Questa mine. Based on an analysis of ongoing studies, this board reported that they believe measures should be taken now to lessen the possibility of a slide, as well as address risk management and public safety issues.

With the support of the board, EMNRD has called for rock pile stabilization designs and plans to be submitted by July 15th. In the meantime, Molycorp has pledged to monitor this pile's moisture level and movement and DPS is quickly assembling a plan to work with effected communities in order to address the safety of citizens in the area.

"Once we were notified by the board of their concerns, we moved quickly to notify other state agencies, mine leadership and local officials," said EMNRD Secretary Joanna Prukop. "Moving forward in concert, we are taking action to put an emergency plan in place that will clearly describe what to do should a slide occur."

"We are taking this issue very seriously," said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. "The area of direct concern lies above Molycorp's offices, the Questa Ranger Station and Route 38 between Questa and Red River. In order to address the concerns of the people in this area and insure their safety, the state has increased its vigilance over this pile."

Among the things to be considered in the emergency plan is the creation of an automated early warning system that will monitor the pile and sound an alarm if movement is detected. This system may include barriers that would stop traffic from entering the portion of the road beneath the pile. Such systems are in use in Utah and Japan at similar sites.

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“We want to assure people in the Questa area that we are doing everything we can to address this issue,” said Tim Manning, Director of DPS’ Office of Emergency Services and Security.

A meeting between the leadership of the EMNRD, NMED, DPS, the State Tourism Department and senior Molycorp officials was held Thursday.

“Molycorp is committed to continuing to work with the state and the Village of Questa to take all appropriate steps to ensure the safety of the community and address any potential risk from the pile,” said Molycorp President Allen Randle.

Stability concerns were originally raised by Amigos Bravos, a local environmental group, during the permitting process at the Questa mine. An independent board of engineers was then contracted to analyze and address these issues. This board reported their findings to the state this week.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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